

Assessment for Learning in Higher Education
Kay Sambell, Liz McDowell and Catherine Montgomery
Routledge (2013)
Review by Kate D’Arcy

A book entitled ‘Assessment’ is not one which you might pick up as light bedtime reading. Lecturers, teachers and other professionals involved with the policy and practice of assessment strategies may not want to think about assessment any more than they absolutely have to. Nevertheless, here is a book that can help you do it better. In addition, the authors do an excellent job of making it an engaging read. They suggest that the book is a practical guide to Assessment for Learning (AfL) which is designed to help busy practitioners put AfL into practice, and I would suggest that this is exactly what they do.

This is a book that can be read from start to finish, but it is also one that you can pick up when you need some ideas about designing assessment, summative and formative assessment strategies, peer and self-assessment, or how to give good student feedback. In the eyes of the authors, AfL is a model which is holistic and can facilitate learner-orientated assessment, and they have designed their AfL model on a set of principles that are grounded in research and practice. Each chapter reflects this approach – it is structured carefully, it contains important theoretical elements as well as examples of how you might actually put the ideas into practice. Case studies from different university teachers in various disciplines are offered to give real, working-life examples of how to implement AfL. Each chapter also concludes with discussion points. This book can therefore be used by an individual teacher but also by a whole team.

The authors suggest that ‘students should realize that assessment can be an opportunity for learning, rather than just something to be endured and suffered’ (p.151). I would suggest that this book is therefore an opportunity for staff and student learning as it supports teachers to support their students to participate in more inspiring assessment processes. Ultimately, implementing some of the ideas and practices within this book should improve and promote student learning. As assessment and feedback are key elements of the NSS, and ones which students still do not rate particularly highly, we cannot deny that this is of central importance to teaching in higher education.

University Teaching in Focus: A Learning-Centred Approach
Lynne Hunt and Denise Chalmers (Eds.)
Routledge (2012)
Review by Tracy-ann Green

This book is aimed and marketed at early-career researchers; however, I am sure even more seasoned academics, as well as relative newbies, would find the book both thought-provoking and challenging. The central tenet of the book is the development of a ‘learning-centred approach’ to higher education, which is summed up quite nicely in the introduction with: ‘There is no one path that works for everyone.’ This premise is maintained throughout the book, and rather than providing a set of rules and techniques to follow, the authors